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### Deposited in DRO:

10 May 2013

### Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

### Peer-review status of attached file:

Not peer-reviewed

### Citation for published item:

Crang, M. (2013) 'Souvenirs, salvage and storied things : remembering community.', in I am seeing things. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, pp. 68-77.

### Further information on publisher's website:

<http://www.iamseeingthings.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/IASTsmall.pdf>

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**Souvenirs, salvage and storied things: remembering community**

What I am talking about comes from a much larger set of projects with a number of collaborators so I will be ventriloquising along the way today. What effect does it have if we take that supply chain and value chain and take it even further, into the after life of things. And I am thinking about the Tales of Things of Electronic Memory. Lets extend the social biographies. Lets look at the movement in and out of the commodity phase. Not just ending as commodities and having use-value, but becoming commodities again then stopping being commodities again and so on. So this is a story that is also about circulation from stocks of objects. Things that we hold idling in our house, our wardrobes and things which are held in hiding by the state that we will come on to and many things that are circulated and how they made to circulate. A large part of the story is about things and about changing things in order to rekindle value. How do you take something which has no value let in it, no worth if you want to put it in those terms, and rekindle that, recreate worth from it? So this is dealing with consumption, not just consumption in terms of using, as context as Irene would say, but also as using up, consuming in that sense, finishing it. So I want to tell some stories about remainder objects; the things which are left over, or actually remainders of objects. What happens when the object themselves have got used up during consumption? And find their story map of object destruction, about actually using things until they have gone, until they have broken. So to continue that cheery theme of death and destruction, I thought I would just illustrate this in a few quotes in terms of things and objects. I will start with Robert Smithson's take on this. The conceptual artist of the 1960s and 70s in the United States, with his comments: 'separate forms, objects, shapes are mere convenient fictions. There is only an uncertain disintegrating order that transcends the limits of rational separations.' Now he does not acknowledge it, but basically he lifted that from Henri Bergson, who was summarised by Bertrand Russell as being about being as flow: "separate things, beginnings and endings are mere convenient fictions: imaginary congealings of the stream" and of course we can take this back further to Heraclitus or Lucretius or if we want back to someone like Gautama Buddha's final words: "It came as if in all composite things, everything ends up breaking, everything ends up being destroyed."

The notion of thing is merely a temporary stabilisation and it one which is maintained by De Lander. So that is the sense I want to pursue here. So let me start with two sets of stories. The first story I am looking at clothes. Why an exemplar of clothes? Because they seem particularly susceptible high emotional charge. And we can take the kind of work by people like Julian Stallabrass looking at his famous essay, 'Marx's Coat', where he actually starts talking about inheriting his dad's jacket and he starts ending up walking like his dad when he is wearing it. He is sort of stumbling upon this idea that the clothes that are received on bodies survive. Or as Louise Crewe put it, there is an "inextricable relation between clothing and memory. Clothes tell stories and store corporeal traces of presence and intimacy. They suggest an instinctive, imagined closeness and trigger strong and vivid memories." And I suppose my concern here is that that it is all a bit too easy. Do they all have memories? I throw away loads of clothes having

outlasted them. I hope to throw away more of my clothes than you very much, even as an academic.

What can we talk about textiles discarded and disposed of? Well there is a sort of discussion about the national wardrobe which is basically you can measure how much clothing we hoard and you can measure how much we chuck away. The national virtual wardrobe is bulging at the moment. There is a huge stock of clothing. So how can that be reused? How can value be rekindled? Well it is difficult. Oxfam do their best. They are one of the major players, but you have got to find the right market for the right piece of clothing to give it value again. Lady Gaga's hand-me-downs, who is going to wear them? To put it quite simply, in terms of Oxfam, they cannot sell heavy woolen coats into Africa. They sell them to Eastern Europe. They sell cotton t-shirts to Africa. They cannot sell bikinis to Southern Africa because culturally women do not wear them. There is a set of industries and processing that goes on, sifting and sorting the clothes we hand in. If it is not sold in about 3 weeks in a charity store, it is heading overseas. That is a significant to a charity store. It is heading principally to sorting plants in Britain and Poland at the moment, and more possibly to Kerala in India, and there it is going to be sifted out into different grades, wool coats go in one direction and other things go in a different direction. They are going to look and if it has got a coffee stain on it is going to go into the shredder – you cannot reuse it, you cannot resell it. It then becomes fabric recovery, material recovery, not reuse of the garments. Of course this is about value and it is about the value of round about nine-thousand to a thousand pounds a ton if you start selling prime grade reusable clothing. If you start selling it shredded grade it is fifty pounds a ton, which is why nice environmentally green enterprises have popped up.

This is my local retail park and I think it is quite significant that right outside the front of Next is the enviro-store clothes recycling Cash for Clothes. They do not care what it is. It is sold by weight and basically exported. Why is this? Because part of the system of material flows, waste and carbon in the British economy. So if you look at a material flows analysis you start to see down the bottom a big, medium blue flow that is exported textiles into Britain. The flows up above are the stuff that we have been re-fabricated inside the UK. This is basically getting you to consumption. It gets you to the consumer. It gets you to the drawer, the wardrobe. And then it hangs about in the wardrobe for a while. In the case of some of us 3 months, in the case of me, about 3 years. And then what happens to it? Well the vast majority does not get sold on the bottom of Selfridges at 170 pounds an item. The vast majority goes into landfill; a whole in the ground of zero value with quite a big carbon footprint. The little light green arrow looping back, that is Oxfam. That is reselling in charity shops and the small dark green flow at the bottom is where it is exported around the world. And it is exported all over; the tales and travels of these garments are quite impressive. The major exporters of new clothing are America (unsurprisingly), Britain, Germany and South Korea. Most South Korean clothing is processed in Malaysia, as is chunks from the USA. Most of Britain's is processed in Poland. From there it is likely to end up in West Africa and India. And from West Africa it is likely to be sold again. Now all of this functions not in the sense of remembering where it has been but in some senses

which you are forgetting. The most high value item to sell to West Africa is bras. People do not want to know who wore them before them. They do not want the stories that came with them, so deliberate forgetfulness. Not only that, but Oxfam do not mind hearing about it might go to someone who is poor in Africa. That is an acceptable outcome. But they do not want to talk about material recovery, which is where more than 70% of their produce will go. Material recovery is where you sort it by grade of fabric and colour. So a sorting media which is in Yorkshire sifting output into grade and they tend to be deliberately shredded and this is sent to India where it is going to be mulched down and rewoven into garments. This is object destruction, not object remembrance and just to extract the first shreds of value before they mulch it down, they are going to snip off all the buttons to sell separately and they are going to snip off all the designer labels to be reapplied to later garments.

Now David Trotter talks about this object destruction. Writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century about household goods, there are two sets of reductions going on here, to exchange value and use value. The first defy the logics of their past, the surplus of value meaning that applies as they are purchased, reduce them to exchange value, far from preserving memories with them, strip them of that. That is what makes them more marketable. Second, if you actually read these accounts, all the people thumbing them, picking them up and looking at them, moving them around, actually wears them out. So in the end what is revealed here is that the objects are waiting disposal, not of their pasts but of their futures. Demonstrates they are still commodities invested in all those promises of values and beyond the salable they have no future at all. It is not just the assault of one system of values, not just exchange value or use but an assault on the very possibility of systems of value. They will become utter rubbish. In Georges Bataille's terms, they will become the 'formless'. So to take an artistic example of that we can think of something like Michael Landy's *Breakdown* (2001), where he took over a shop in Oxford Street and instead of having it selling lots and lots of products he took all of his life's possessions, classifying them into 7,227 lots and sent them through a grinder. This is an economy of destruction, not recollection and accumulation and far from investing in the objects it is about divesting value from objects and consumption exhausting materials.

Let me take a very different example, and take it through the same sort of process and going to riff on this theme. I am going to talk about warships – all the way from textile to warships. Now most studies of souvenirs and militaria focus on either nice shiny medals, in which case we are big on providence. We want the stories with them, have the story with them, lots more value. Or even things like shrapnel have been looked at. A lovely study looked at how kids in the first world war collected shrapnel. While it was hot from the bombs it was exciting. When it got cold, rather like pebbles from a beach, when it stopped being shiny and new they just became bits of metal with little value. In terms of the fabrication of stuff out of military artifacts, originally in first world war trenches, turning bullet cases into small figurines things like this, then was the transformation, as it were, of the whole souvenir industry to sell them and finally you get kitsch new workings which are like stuff produced from the trenches. And of course people keep souvenirs and Harrison has done a lovely study as to why souvenirs were taken from American

servicemen who killed Japanese opponents in the Second World War. An act of atonement to return them because frankly they would get into trouble when they went home. But what souvenirs always present then are both stories both of presence and loss. They bring the past to us but also mark out its loss at the same time. They are ambivalent objects. So the way it works with ships is a slightly different kettle of fish here. For a start the unit of identification, and we can say this is the ship, that's the original, that is the batch, that is the everything. Moreover, ships have got very extended lives; military ships can serve for fifty, sixty years quite easily. And that means that they are mostly, platform technologies, the ones I am going to talk about, like transport ships, glorified ferries. Most of the time they have spent tootling round in peace time, trying to look for things to do. Not glamorous high episodes of combat. And it is a story about obsolescence, decommission and finally destruction. So it is to say multiple temporalities of the material culture. Not just during conflict, not just battle. I am going to try and suggest that reincarnation of things is not always affirming.

So Britain is going through quite a phase of getting rid of spare military ships. How is this done? It is done through a glorified ebay system. You can buy old blankets. You can buy old berets, you can buy old aircraft carriers on the same system. So this is the Arc Royal being sold, for what it is worth, and after it is sold someone has indeed graffitied 'sold' on the frame. What happens when people hear it is being sold off is a campaign to save the ship. You name it, every a training ship, even a reef. Very, very few are successful. Ninety-five times out of a hundred this ship is heading for scrap. But it is couched in terms of death. There is an anthropomorphism about ships. They are given names, they are personified, this is death in a quite strong sense. So this is HMS Intrepid, an assault ship (AKA ferry), which is being towed from its final resting place to be destroyed, from Portsmouth to Liverpool. And of course recommencing the community is all the former crew or large chunks of them turn up on the harbour-side to watch it get towed out. It is gradually towed along and people start thinking about symbolic souvenirs. Can we take the name badge off the funnel? Can you wear the cap of the US and so you find this memorabilia; very low-key, but then the ship goes to its place of rest in this case a piece of decay obsolescence and Victoriana itself, an old dry dock in Bootle in Liverpool where it is going to be destroyed. What does the salvage company do? They offer to sell bits of it to the former crew, so a secondary former crew come round stripping things off. These are the lads going around it, and the reason I put this kind of porthole leading to a ladder at the bottom is because the lad second left along had to admit that he had grown slightly sideways since he had been on the crew as they would not fit. And so it was to a member of the crew that it had high value – commercial value and symbolic, and so they started putting it into a separate container flogging it off. Now it is symbolic in terms of exchange value that because one of the things they successfully flogged off to a former crew member was the ships telephone exchange, he used to work on. Not something his wife was terribly pleased about having in her front room. This was then consigned to the shed showing further lives of things and how they travel across, how they disrupt, how they destabilise. The crew's stories dominate through. She was not very happy about him going on and on about the time before he met her sailing and having a woman in every port. There is commercial use, in terms of things that you might actually sell on again, as

second-hand products, although this is pretty limited. The limit is that it costs money to go round and extract all these things and time is money itself. What you want to do as a scrap merchant is make money - you have paid for it and now you need to turn into money. And so this is what they do – there is a whole kind of time maps thing for the way a ship disappears. Do we take out every stainless steel washbasin? No, because it is not worth it. The time it will take versus just scrapping it through. The problem they have got is that they have to go through and take out things like asbestos and this is why it is not viable to scrap most ships in Britain. Of course it is not actually viable to scrap a ship like this either, on the commercial value, because you have to bid to the government to buy it. So what you do is you bid by saying you think this ship contains about 5% high quality steel and the rest low quality steel. And the government says, 'why yes that seems like a fair deal to us squire'. And as one official put it to us misquoting him out of non-ferous metals, so in other words you have to miscalculate what is in the thing in order to make it valuable, because nobody knows what is in it. They had an entire room full of documentation about this vessel, so much documentation, so many stories and yet you only logical thing was to ignore every one, because they could not make sense of it. And so gradually the ship disappears. The ship in terms of an object is destroyed until finally it becomes a pile of steel and the place where there was a ship. This is a story of disappearance not persistence.

This is a US monument and its made in metal from eight different ships which were melted together and symbolic binding the crews who had taken part in specific actions and so on. So even though those objects and people are no longer naval, no longer serve, all these people have retired from the navy long since and the relics are still are what is binding these people into a unit, but the sort of story we are telling here is, here in salvage, is less like commemoration and more like iconoclasm, destruction. So it is lamenting the mooring of loss and death as well as persistence and continuity. It is about the fracture of belonging, in that sense; the story of who you once were but are no longer. The point I am trying to make here is that the category of object death is basically under examined but important socially. How they meet their final end, how they meet their demise. At the very end here I thought I would try and return slightly to the sort of themes we have been talking on. We have talked about the motivating factor, the cause of outrage of object death and I mentioned these campaigns so this is the daily mail and a piece by senior naval officer Commander John Muxworthy. The title is: "No wonder we can't even topple a tin-pot gangster like Gaddafi: Invincible, pride of the Falklands, is broken up in knacker's yard". These are the stories that get written. To bring it back to today its obviously not just ships, its not just clothes. This is from Chris Jordon's series 'Running the numbers' and the title for this photomontage is 'cell phones', 4266,000 equal to the number retired in the US everyday.